

2019 Furbearer Advisory Committee Meeting

Summary

May 22 – May 23, 2019
Kemp Station, Minocqua, WI

DNR Committee Members in Attendance: Shawn Rossler, Chair, Wildlife Management (WM), Nathan Roberts, Office of Applied Science (OAS), Sam Jonas, WM, SOD, Todd Naas, WM, NOD, Brandon Stefanski, WM, WCD, Jake Fries, WM, Nate Kroeplin, Law Enforcement (LE), Jim Woodford, Natural Heritage Conservation (NHC)

Invited Ojibwe Biological Advisor Committee Member in Attendance: Jonathan Gilbert, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), Tanya Aldred, GLIFWC

Invited Committee Members in Attendance: David Ruid, USDA-APHIS-Wildlife Services (WS), Ken Pemble, U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Dan Eklund, USFS, Jim Hanson, Wisconsin Bear Hunter's Association (WBHA), Arnold Groehler, Wisconsin Trapper's Association (WTA), Ed Harvey, Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC), Pat Quaintance, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation (WWF), Al Lobner, Hunter's Rights Coalition (HRC)

Advisory Committee Assistant: Curtis Twellmann, WM

Invited Department Staff: Brian Dhuey, OAS, WM, Bill Dodge, OAS, Linda Olver, Customer and Outreach Services (COS), Skyler Vold, COS, Glen Stauffer, OAS

Invited Guest: Laurie Groskopf, Public

May 22, 2019: Day 1 – Reports and Updates

Committee charter – The recommendations coming out of this meeting will be brought to the leadership team this summer. They are recommendations until accepted.

12:00 PM Meeting initiated by Shawn Rossler with Kemp Station logistics, introductions and agenda repairs. There is a request to add the topic of hunting fisher with hounds to the agenda. It will be added to the day 2 agenda.

Committee review - At the end of last year, it was decided that this committee should have an even number of representatives from each region, thus eliminating one northern region representative as opposed to 2018.

Meeting Protocol – Decisions made by this committee are recommendations. We will strive to come together with collective consent on all issues. In case of a lasting disagreement, documentation will be noted in the meeting minutes and concerns will be shared with the leadership team for consideration. The data and discussions shared at this meeting will be relayed to the tribes by the GLIFWC representative.

Furbearer Management Update led by Shawn Rossler – At this year's Spring Hearings, the otter season with a bag limit framework passed and is moving forward. This was discussed at this meeting last year. We will start the conversations of what the bag limit may be here this year. Other details of the season framework like having to specify zone of harvest and when will also be discussed. This will help us get ahead of our timeline for 2020 implementation. Reminder that this will not take effect this year.

We have been reviewing registration and tagging for bobcat, fisher and otter. WM, LE, COS and the WCC have been involved with this review. We will discuss the possible changes in this meeting. Sponsored by DNR leadership including Kimberly Curry, Eric Lobner and Todd Schaller.

The Midwest furbearer workshop was held in Enid Ok a couple weeks ago. This was a joint workshop with the SE and Midwest. Muskrat declines again were a top priority across the board. This included another call for research across broad geographic areas. Bounties were also discussed as South Dakota has implemented bounties. We will discuss this within this committee for informational purposes.

We have had 4 fur schools this season. Our agency fur school was modified to include in-the-field trapping at Horicon marsh to address one of the popular recommendations that we receive on the exit survey to include some real-life trapping. The week of October 21st will be the next agency fur school which will run like last year with a trapping component at Horicon.

This July 22nd in Ashland we will be conducting BMP necropsies. Watch for a call to participate. The critters are being stored at the FRTC in DeForest. Four vets are coming in from around the country to assist. We may need skinning help.

Trapper education update led by Curtis Twellmann – In 2018 we had 1125 graduates from the Wisconsin Cooperative Trapper Education Program (WCTEP). A total of 81 classes were held which included 16 Field test-outs offered for students of the online or correspondence course. Four of these were Wisconsin fur schools held for staff and college students that are future wildlife professionals. We have 255 active trapper education instructors and a new coordinator on the WTA side. Jim Binder has taken over for Bryce Larson and will oversee the trapper education program on the WTA side. Contact information has been updated.

We are pushing to increase availability in some areas of the state where classes can be tough to come by. We have been posting all classes on the WTA website on top of being posted on GOWILD so that classes don't disappear once they are full. This may help students with planning. We are increasing social media promotion of classes and developing means to find students who are looking for classes and mentors. We would also like to develop some means to judge course effectiveness to use in the management of the program.

Wisconsin Trappers Association update led by Arnold Groehler – Past president, Scott Zimmermann gives his regards. He is healing up from a back surgery. I have been busy in Madison, meeting with the new committee folks and legislatures. Few of these people have outdoor experience it seems. Trying to educate them on trapping in Wisconsin and its importance has been my primary goal so far. "Wisconsin

– the fur state” should be our new state motto with the importance of the fur trade in our history along with the current importance of both wild and ranched fur in this state.

Our membership has been slowly increasing even with the lower fur prices. Fur prices are slowly increasing in some areas. The reasons people are entering into trapping are less dependent upon fur prices these days with more people looking to trap for unique species like bobcats. Have seen some noticeable increases in wildlife populations around urban environments which has kept the nuisance crowd busy.

Trappers in general would like to continue to see increased opportunities to match the increased populations. Trappers would also like to discuss the possibility of trapping bears with foot-cables. We will likely see this on next year’s spring hearings. No real pressing issues for trappers in Wisconsin at the moment, only tweaks so going pretty well. With the trade talks ongoing, there will be a 25% tariff on wild fur imported to China. Since most of the dealings are done in Canada and not the US, some tariffs will be worked around that way. Time will tell what impact if any this has on the market.

GLIFWC research updates led by Jonathan Gilbert and Tanya Aldred – Jonathan may be retiring within the next couple years and will be replaced by Tanya at these meetings in the future.

We (GLIFWC) are collaborating with Jean-Francois Robitaille, an Associate Professor from Laurentian University in Ontario on some bobcat body-condition and diet work. A couple weeks ago we took stomachs and kidneys from the carcasses at DeForest being processed from the harvest season. We are looking at kidney fat analysis to determine overall body condition and examining stomachs to identify prey species. We will then be able to relate how body condition may influence diet and vice versa. This will directly tie back to some of the research I completed many years ago. We will be able to see how things have changed in the past couple decades.

Two marten projects are ongoing. We are looking at forest structure before and after timber harvests. The study area includes mixed deciduous forest types with pockets of upland hemlock and cedar. The stands are being cut now, we will reevaluate after the harvest. We not only look at the living timber but also assign decay classes to dead and fallen logs. In the hemlock forest the decay classes are on average higher than the deciduous forests. These decayed logs may be important for marten?

The second marten project is looking at their prey sources. We are working with Dr. Pauli on this project and looking at small mammal abundance among the hemlock/cedar and deciduous forests. We are trapping small mammals in summer and winter. We built a special trap to use in the winter as this is much more difficult at this time of year. It is like an insulated culvert type trap that allows us to trap in harsh conditions while keeping the captured animals alive and comfortable. Hand warmers were tried as a way to provide warmth to captured critters but were not effective and so will likely not be used next year. With little air movement the chemical warmers wouldn’t work correctly. We had low mortality rates using the insulated traps. We will continue to use this type of trap as it has been working quite well.

USDA Wildlife Services update led by Dave Ruid - In 2018 we removed 2,865 beavers which is the highest in program history. We also had 140 incidental otters. The trend over the past several years is that the beaver take is increasing. We have had good rainfall the past 4 summers, resulting in ample habitat and an increase in beaver numbers. Requests for assistance are increasing and effort has remained fairly consistent. We work with DNR, USFS, GLIFWC, Counties, townships and private organizations. USDA WS does work on about 1800 miles of trout streams, 40 rice lakes and various other county and private lands across Wisconsin. About 1200 beaver were taken from trout streams last year. Over ½ of the beaver we take now are related to infrastructure protection (roads, bridges, culverts). This is a shift, as in the past almost all beaver were taken on trout streams. Sawyer county lead the list of counties with 362 beavers removed.

2017 was the year with the highest amount of incidental otter at 152. We saw a slight reduction in 2018 with 140 otters taken. In 2018, we removed 20.5 beaver per otter. In terms of our beaver catch: 75% were taken with body grip traps with the rest being a mix of footholds, snares and shooting.

We removed about 1700 dams in 2018, 1511 manually and 178 with explosives. We were able to salvage 1135 beaver in 2018. We generally refer private complaints to the WTA nuisance trappers list. Millions of dollars of resources are protected by the program. We provide some financial assistance to the FTW from our salvaged fur/castor funds.

Question comes from the committee about leaving beaver to help slow down the water in Chequamegon bay? That magnitude of water is not going to be significantly slowed down by beaver dams in my opinion. USDA does not designate the streams in need of protection, that would be a discussion with DNR fisheries. Fisheries is researching the effectiveness of different management techniques now.

Law Enforcement update led by Nate Kroeplin – Probably the biggest issue in law enforcement currently is finding out how the recreational property enforcement is going to align with and possibly impact our normal duties. We started 6 wardens last year, so smaller recruit class. Some park rangers are coming back and will be assigned to some of the busier parks. We are advertising new openings currently and will be trying to hire 11 new wardens this cycle, primarily to work in parks.

Trap incident reports – For the 2018/19 season we had 14 foothold incidents, all straight forward no major injuries, 4 cable restraint incidents with 2 deer killed, 2 incidents with illegal snares, 2 body-grip incidents with 1 resulting in a cat fatality. Both body grip incidents were in illegal sets by the same trapper.

For the 2019 season so far we have had 3 foothold incidents with 1 injury, 1 body-grip incident with an illegal set which killed a dog and a couple of cable-restraint and snare incidents with no serious injuries.

Question from the committee: What about increased signage to let people know traps are on the landscape? There has been an increase in signage including traps on public properties in recent years and this will continue.

Furbearer Surveys update led by Brian Dhuey – Last year we extensively talked about surveys and we decided to end the winter track count and otter surveys. Both surveys were dropped last season. The other furbearer and trapper surveys all continued like normal. Results will be available in August for the 2018 season. Alternatives to the dropped surveys including catch-per-unit (CPU) effort surveys will hopefully replace the track survey in time but we are still looking at possibilities.

Carcass Collection update led by Nathan Roberts – For the 2018/19 season we collected bobcat carcasses along with both otter and fisher jaws. This resulted in a large number of animals making this effort more difficult. With some quotas increasing, we may not need to look at every individual sample. A sub-sample could provide the needed sample size to have faith in the data while reducing the cost and effort associated with gathering it. A sub-sample method of carcass collection could also be beneficial to trappers/hunters as some harvesters would be able to keep their entire bobcat, fisher or otter carcass including the skull. When we do collect parts, we can look at ways we may be able to collect less of the animal as well to both reduce effort and make things easier for harvesters. We generally collect the full bobcat carcass to open animals to determine sex and pull reproductive tracts from females. Sex ratios might be a problem if we quit collecting the entire carcass as bobcats are notoriously mis-sexed in the field. The sex ratio is important with the model. We might be able to sex animals using genetics which wouldn't require the whole carcass but we're not sure if this would be cost prohibitive at this time? We will take random samples for fisher and otter from the samples collected this season. With otter it's not likely there is much, if any harvest selection. Being so, we feel that the age structure observed from our harvested otter is comparable with what's actually on the landscape. We need an effective way to sub-sample these animals to retain this data with less effort. Probably will need to continue to look at bobcats every year but every three years is probably good for otter and fisher. Sending in jaws has been working well and makes it easier and cheaper on us with no skull returns. Consolidating the carcass stops to 7 regional stops has made collection more manageable for us. Hope to have the CPU effort surveys going within the next couple years. Might be a couple year data gap between the retired surveys and the replacement.

Bobcat Research update led by Bill Dodge – Understanding bobcat population dynamics for better management. In the north we have a 12-county bobcat study area in Northern Wisconsin. It's a large area at around 12,000 miles squared. Our objectives with this study are to refine the population model, estimate reproductive rates and determine cause specific mortality of Northern Wisconsin bobcats. We can also look at home ranges and habitat use with the GPS collars as precise locations are recorded using GPS.

Wisconsin bobcat harvest history - Prior to 1970 the bobcat harvest was not regulated. In 2014, harvest went statewide as the southern zone opened for harvest.

Our project methods have leaned heavily on private trappers to increase efficiency. Bobcats are expensive to trap as it takes many trap nights on average to capture one. Private trappers catch them incidentally in canine sets (if they have no tag) and can call the bobcat hotline and we will try to come out and collar the animal while recording some data. Generally, the trapper enjoys this experience and it saves us a great deal of time and money. The release also allows us to chat with trappers about bobcats

and management in person. To date we have had 81 bobcats captured in the north with 75 of these being collared. We have cooperated with 58 private trappers, some with multiple catches in the Northern study area. We have collected around 13000 GPS points, collected every 13 hours. We send trappers updates on “their” bobcat periodically. They seem to enjoy this update. It’s a positive experience for both us and them.

We used program “RMark” in this analysis. We used a known-fates model to determine harvest and non-harvest season survival. In model 1, (m and f survival is considered equal) adult overall survival was .68 with a .80 survival during the harvest season and .90 survival in the non-harvest season. In model 2 we treated the males and females differently. Male survival is around 10% less than females. Most mortality observed was human caused. Legal harvest was the most observed cause of mortality at 11 animals. Five bobcats were poached, three were incidentally killed, three were road kills and 4 died of unknown causes (4-year period). We see that an increase in harvest may not always decrease survival rates.

Uterine scars are used to determine reproduction in bobcats. Since we get an age for each animal, adult and yearling pregnancy rate is figured out separately. As expected, fewer yearlings are reproductively active than adults. Over 80% of adult females showed evidence of being reproductively active in 2018.

We estimated bobcat home ranges in the north using 90% kernel density estimates. Typically, male home ranges overlap multiple female home ranges. Lots of variation with home ranges. Females vary from 6 – 60 km squared and males 13.4 to over 200 km squared. Average home range size is 29.7 km² for females with the home ranges of males being around double this. Male home ranges increase during the breeding season while it seems that female’s ranges stay the same. We want to thank all the trapper cooperators who have been paramount in this incredible sample size as well as the landowners allowing us access to the critters.

We have estimated that by working with public trappers, over \$150,000 has been saved and we have had zero capture related mortalities in this large effort. Most of these cats are caught in footholds. Both of those facts are impressive.

Beaver Survey update led by Nathan Roberts – We initiated a small catch per unit effort survey this past season. We sent out about 1500 daily trapping logs (journals/diary) for beaver trappers this past season. We want to compare the CPU effort to the surveys we have been using. Haven’t compared these yet as we are still waiting on some data from the previous season.

Originally, we sent this beaver survey out in November. Answers on other surveys had indicated that November sees the most trapping effort but this may not be the best month to send out a survey specifically for beaver. Hearing that many trappers target beavers later in the season around spring break up leads us to believe that the spring may result in better data.

Otter Surveys update led by Nathan Roberts – We found that ice cover was more predictive of seeing otter tracks than population levels in the aerial surveys. With questions on the integrity of the data and a robust price tag, aerial surveys may not be a cost-effective way to monitor otters. Some bridge survey

techniques are being tinkered with now. We plan to test these as a cheaper alternative to gather information about Wisconsin's otter population moving forward.

We still do wolf track surveys in the winter and collect other furbearer occurrences as well while we are at it. We are working on a phone App that will guide citizen scientists to conduct wolf/furbearer track surveys. We should be able to use this as a useful metric in the future.

There is a beaver/trout project in the works. It will be looking at what impact beaver have on trout. Objectively looking at this interaction in diverse ways. The methods are still getting figured out. Some candidate streams have been identified as possible treatments, but this list will not be publicized to preserve the integrity of the data. Don't want the advertisement to impact normal trapping pressure. After some baseline data is gathered, some streams that were managed will be left unmanaged to see what happens and vice versa. This will be a long-term project. May take many years to answer some of these questions. Fisheries, WM and WS are all involved.

The WTA is interested in research on large scale muskrat declines but there are limited management changes that could occur from such a study. We prioritize research that has a high probability of influencing management.

Wildlife Health update led by Lindsey Long (absent) with supplied notes - Lindsey was not able to come to the meeting but passed along a couple notes to share with the committee. There was a small tularemia outbreak in muskrats last year around Green Bay. Likely just a local impact with this small outbreak. We have seen an increase in canine distemper (CDT) in recent years. We confirmed CDT in 4 species last year including badger, raccoon, coyote and gray fox. Other animals may have had CDT but were not confirmed. Two bobcats were found that died of FDT (feline parvo virus or feline distemper).

Furbearer Registration and Tagging update led by Shawn Rossler – A request came down from the sponsorship team in mid-March to reevaluate our bobcat, fisher and otter tagging and registration procedure. A team was assembled to review the BFO registration and tagging process and we have been meeting weekly for the past several weeks. The goals of this exercise are making registration/tagging easier for harvesters and reducing staff workload and expense associated with tagging and registration. Of course, the ability to enforce laws and the integrity of our biological data will need to be maintained. The team met weekly talking through different scenarios and the needs of the different programs (LE, WM, COS and harvesters). Two of these species are CITES Species so the USFWS CITES requirements were considered along with our charge. Restrictions with GAMEREG and GOWILD were also considered. There is significant overlap with the coming otter season transition, so this is a good time to review. This process is not yet complete, but the group has been moving towards the following recommendation: Wanting to sub-sample the BFO populations so that not all harvested critters are needed to be collected. Continue the drawing for bobcats and fisher at the same time, August 1st with no change. Harvest authorizations would be used instead of durable tags for fisher and otter (no drawing for otter with the bag limit), with no requirement to tag these critters in the field but proof of harvest authorization must be carried in the field (printed tag, conservation card, DL). For bobcats, the continued use of the durable tag with in field tagging requirements are recommended. If these suggestions don't get altered, bobcat

will be treated differently than otter and fisher in the future. For the sample collection, we would send out a durable carcass tag to a random sample of harvesters ahead of the season who would need to meet with a warden to turn over the critter's carcass or parts for data collection. Other harvesters would not need to do any type of in person registration and can retain the entire carcass. Everyone will still need to self-register BFOs on GAMEREG via the phone or internet by 5 pm the day after harvest. CITES tags would be mailed out to harvesters whether their harvested critter is being sampled or not. Harvesters would attach CITES tags to the pelts. Folks selected to be a part of the sub sample will still have an in-person registration but the CITES tags will be mailed out separate to the in-person registration and parts collection. These are all suggestions now and any part of this can be changed, added to or dropped before adoption. Planned to be implemented in 2020 along with the otter bag limit.

What has changed to justify such substantial changes? With increased quotas, work load has increased as have complaints that the process is not convenient for staff and harvesters alike.

Having phone in and internet registration and the harvester attach the CITES tag, satisfies the CITES requirements from the USFWS.

Compliance is always an issue and with this collection method, compliance may suffer. This will be something to monitor especially if fur markets rebound.

We think that mandatory carcass collection will be important even if taking a sub-sample. Would reports on age be a sufficient enough incentive to retain high sample sizes if carcass collection was voluntary? Harvesters may not be as interested in the age of a fisher as opposed to a bear or bobcat. To maintain sample sizes, mandatory carcass collection is preferred even if switching to a smaller sub-sample.

Reporting Incidentals led by Shawn Rossler, Nathan Roberts and Brian Dhuey – We used to use an accounting style model to estimate BFO populations for the state. In these models, incidental kill reporting was important for accuracy. The model was like balancing a checkbook and more “expenditure” and “income” data increased the models accuracy. BFO incidental tags and registration began at the urging of this committee to track this form of mortality or “expenditure” back when that data was useful. Knowing the incidental take is less important with the models that we are currently using.

It's worth looking at whether we think it's important to keep track of incidentals and roadkill at all. In our model, we already assume non-harvest or “natural” mortality. We will never get a full sample of all roadkills, so should we spend time on an incomplete data set of little use? We also are unsure about what percentage of incidentals get reported.

Do we need to record roadkill for any reason? No reasons come up from the committee.

Do we care about recording incidental animals at all? The OAS feels that incidental numbers for otter are still important especially from USDA – WS due to their consistency. Bobcat and fisher incidentals

would not be needed by OAS. Committee agrees that we don't need to record incidentals for bobcat or fisher. We will continue to monitor otter incidentals for the time being.

Organized Hunts, Bounties and Incentive Programs led by Shawn Rossler – Questions and concerns about hunting competitions or organized hunts are increasing and some states have outlawed them recently. As an emerging topic, we should open this up for discussion.

The public is concerned with this issue. There was some bad media attention from some “bad apples” with critters dumped in ditches with no utilization this winter.

The committee talks about some local organized hunts and their importance to some businesses. Some of the organized hunts are fundraisers or benefits for worthy causes like cancer research. There has been some propaganda spread around from questionable sources on what commonly takes place in a hunt like this.

On the other side, some hunters have stopped participating in contests because they have noticed that it has impacted hunting. Not by population decreases but by educating coyotes by increasing pressure and possibly by using less subtle methods.

The committee does not wish to take an official stance on this issue. Still the discussion illustrates that the topic is diverse and may have a wide range of impacts.

Bounty programs have made a comeback in South Dakota. Bounties were used heavily prior to 1960 but have since fell out of favor for a variety of reasons. Now several nest predating species like skunks and raccoons have a 10\$ bounty when the tails are brought in for South Dakotans.

Little discussion by the committee and no real support for bounties or incentive programs but the committee doesn't want to take a negative stance on them at this time either. We will remain neutral with the stance that the range of effectiveness of bounty programs range from too effective to not at all effective. There is a high likelihood of fraud and these programs are generally not looked upon favorably by the non-hunting public. Bounties should only be considered in certain circumstances.

Marten Protection Area Rule Proposal led by Shawn Rossler – We have had this discussion previously about creating a third MPA and allowing 2 new trap types in the 3 MPA areas. The 2 new trap types allowed would include weasel boxes with opening restrictions (4-day check boxes) and footholds with a pan tension set to at least 4 pounds. There was support for the third MPA and the weasel boxes but we were not all comfortable with the footholds. We decided to move forward with the proposal. There was a breakdown in communication about this rule proposal, so we had a follow up meeting with some of the marten committee to discuss this. They had similar concerns as the furbearer committee. The leadership team decided to postpone this to the May meeting to allow additional time for comments. Is there any more discussion or questions at this time?

Trappers are puzzled at why the marten aren't expanding, at what point do we give up on the marten in WI? This is a legitimate question; the trappers have supported marten for years but would like to see

some positive news on their status. We aren't ready to give up yet. It's our one endangered mammal and one of importance to many. We are learning more about them in many ways.

We (GLIFWC) estimate there are around 300 martens in the state. The MPA areas originally came about in the 60's following fisher reintroductions to restore fisher numbers. Marten started in the 70's and the same protections and areas were used. The fisher were doing really well and we revisited MPA rules in these areas to include cable restraints and box traps for upland trapping. We increased opportunities while still providing ample protection for our one endangered mammal. Now we have 3 marten population centers in the state, which is good. The MPA on the island doesn't do much since nobody traps out on the islands anyway. Weasel boxes with opening restrictions were also widely supported. The footholds have been controversial and could not get a unanimous decision in either committee. The fact that this is moving forward without this consensus on the foothold issue is disheartening and alarming. As written this is not enforceable, and this will threaten the states only listed mammal. Doing so could potentially be damaging to trapping's reputation. There are lots of opportunities in the MPAs without the footholds. Weasel boxes, cage traps, cable-restraints and underwater traps are all allowed and have little to no risk to marten. Why change all that when there is no agreement? The breakdown in communication was not the primary issue that was concerning with this. Deciding to move forward with strong opposition was a much bigger concern for me.

When we initially talked about this, we talked about a device that we could use as an under spring to ensure that this was enforceable and more uniform. Now the device isn't listed so you just need 4 pounds of pan tension and to me this is not exactly what some of us supported.

The concerns of the committee are valued and noted. We can try to discuss further the use of a device to achieve a desired pan tension with the marten folks and the NOD representative. The positives of using a device is that enforceability goes up but the drawbacks are identifying a device that will work across a wide range of variables from weather to substrates.

Since this is currently moving forward we need to figure out how best to properly educate trappers in the area and figure out a monitoring strategy. Incidentals are going to be important to monitor going forward but might be tough to get accurate data on. We also have a signage issue that we need to discuss and address.

What is so different about the martens in Minnesota? MN has a healthy marten population but has more boreal forest and better marten habitat. We are on the edge of marten habitat. The UP is more curious because they are more similar to WI and their martens seem to be doing well. I don't think we should give up on marten yet.

Mink/muskrat zone change led by Ed Harvey and Shawn Rossler – Splitting the state into 3 muskrat/mink zones with different season dates has passed 3 years in a row through the WCC and has been favorably discussed in this committee. The DNR committee tabled this and added it as an advisory question for this year along with plans for a social survey to better determine support for a 3-zone framework. Muskrats don't rank high enough on research priority to be a standalone survey. We will

work with Brian Dhuey to add questions to our current surveys to get at this information. This hasn't fallen off the radar but leadership was not ready to act upon it yet.

This is probably the most important issue on our agenda for trappers. They want 1 week of open water in the fall and opportunities in the spring. The statewide opener may be simpler, but it does not consider factors like weather or prime-ness that was used to set season dates in the past. Wisconsin is too diverse of a state for a single opener. Haven't heard any support for staying with the single statewide opener.

People are disappointed that this hasn't moved forward yet. This has passed time and time again and is a critical issue for trappers everywhere. Yet nothing has changed?

Since the season was just simplified in 2014, there wasn't a rush to change it back again.

I think we have more support on this now so what is the hold up?

I think we just want to get it right this next time instead of going back and forth every few years. There will be a change coming but we hope it will be a structure we can stick with for a long time.

What's the biggest obstacle in getting the opinion survey going?

It would be a cost in time more than money to create an independent survey. Have to prioritize as we are strapped for time as it is. To add something likely means needing to cut something else.

Wolf delisting update led by Nathan Roberts – The USFWS has initiated a delisting process again. The proposed rule is in the federal register for its comment period which was extended. The comment period for wolves has been extended to a 4-month comment period lasting until July 15th. Most comments are against delisting and are form letters. They must respond to all comments which is going to take a while. When we met with USFWS, they figured this would be a yearlong process. This delisting attempt is different because they took a range wide approach (exception for Mexican gray wolves). This is a broader approach than previous attempts. There is a requirement for a post-delisting monitoring plan. We are working with the USFWS to figure out this monitoring process. We do know there will be a public meeting before this comment period is finished. Likely if this does become a rule, it will be challenged. We are required by law that if wolves are delisted, we must have a season. I would encourage people to comment on the rule.

May 23, 2019: DAY 2 – Species quotas

Meeting Initiated by Shawn Rossler at 7:50 AM with day 2 introductions and agenda repairs. Agenda amended to include a hunting fisher with hounds discussion and a discussion on using foot snares for bears.

Fisher – North Zone led by Nathan Roberts – We consolidated the zones last year to just a north and south zone from the 6 zones we had been using. We also used the 3-year average success rate as opposed to the 3-year maximum success rate we used to use. The season was also lengthened and

lasted an extra 6 days in 2018/19. The 2018/19 harvest was 1044 fishers with a success rate of 19.3 %. We also saw an increase in tribal harvest to 64 from 19 last year. Looking at harvest distribution from last year we see a similar pattern to the 2 years previous, indicating that the zone consolidation did not significantly impact where the fisher harvest is coming from. Success rates tracked similar patterns across the 2 zones with the northern success rate being a bit higher. We have a population model for the northern zone. Last year we switched to the average success rate but with an extended season, moving forward we may want to use this year's success rate since it's the only year with the extended season. We had lots of uncertainty last year with all the changes, the OAS would like to use the same quota from last season to continue to look at harvest distribution and how it may change with the 2 zone framework. Last year we had a northern quota of 375. The fisher season was extended beyond the new year legislatively.

When the state goes over quota we generally say that we will adjust the next year to make up for it. To do nothing after going over won't go over very well with the tribes. If I look at the model, if we want to stabilize fisher populations we need a harvest way down in the 250 range. Can't imagine going that low but the data shows that a decrease in quota is needed to stabilize the population. GLIFWC reps suggest a quota of 300 for 2019.

If we keep the same quota and used the higher success rates there will be fewer permits available. If we were to decrease the quota, we can still look at harvest re-distribution.

Reports from the public indicate stable to increasing fisher numbers across much of the north, anecdotally but we did over shoot the harvest goal so I agree that 300 would be an appropriate response to last year's robust harvest.

300 is conservative in my opinion but OAS wouldn't be opposed.

Those border counties with higher fisher harvests may be getting fisher moving over from MN. Not sure what level of pressure or fisher density they have right across the border? Might be inflating harvest.

Committee Recommendation: FAC quota recommendation of 300 fisher in the north zone using the highest (last years) success rate to allocate tags.

Fisher – South Zone led by Glen Stauffer – We don't have a population model for fisher in the south. The quota has held steady the past couple years. Success rate is holding steady also but is lower than it was 4 or 5 years ago.

Fisher in the south appear stable. The OAS suggests that we stay the course in the south with no reason to increase or decrease the fisher quota.

Hearing that many people are seeing a few more fisher than in previous years with only a couple people in the central forest reporting a perceived decline.

The OAS also suggests that we should keep what success rate we use (average or max) consistent. I think we should use last year's success rate for the south as well which would equal a few less permits available.

Don't hear complaints on fisher like I do on otter. People complain about the lack of otter tags compared to what is available, but I don't hear that same thing with fishers. See no reason to argue for an increase or a decrease, so staying the course seems reasonable.

Fisher are generalists, but they are summer heat limited so can't go much further south than here except in areas with higher elevations. They can use lots of kinds of cover and are pretty adaptable. The fishers seem to be redistributing to the fringe area south of the northern forests. This would be consistent with historical fisher range.

What do we know about the prey base, is it changing?

We have seen a decrease in voles where we trap and an increase in shrews. Might be something going on there.

Committee Recommendation: FAC recommends maintaining the 600 fisher quota in the south for another year using last year's success rate to allocate tags, thus reducing the number of permits available.

River Otter led by Glen Stauffer and Nathan Roberts – Not much new going on with otter which is good. No concerns with population levels. We have a lot of otter habitat and I think they are doing well. Last year we completed a range wide population assessment for river otter for the CITES program. This was a range wide no detriment finding. Not a single state indicated a decline in otter populations though many have harvest seasons. The fur market is low for otter which doesn't appear to be on the move. Interest is lower now than a decade ago. The season just ended 3 weeks ago so all the data is not yet available and some of these numbers could change. A goal with otter is to convert incidentals into legally harvested otter by providing more opportunity. In the future we will probably look at APHIS otter separately. The state harvest saw a modest increase this past season with 1466 river otter harvested. Success rates have been declining but may have more to do with trapper effort than population changes. Fewer people are water trapping. Aerial surveys and snow tracking have been discontinued (discussion from day 1). Number of permits have been increasing and success rates decreasing. Success rates last year were 12% across both zones with slightly higher success rates in the north.

We have incomplete data at this time, so we did not put together a population model for this meeting.

For 2020 otter will likely be a bag limit species but in 2019 the season will be a quota permit species like it's been previously.

We hear from trappers that they question why other states have such a high otter harvest and we are so conservative?

Need to be careful comparing other states. Areas with high abundance of crayfish especially non-burrowing crayfish, can support more dense otter populations. We don't have that prey base like other states do. We have a lot of habitat but the prey base may not be as abundant as it is in other states.

The OAS suggests we keep with the same quota and use the 3-year average to allocate permits.

The fur market on otter is flat at best. No increases in demand expected.

If pelt price increased dramatically, we could potentially do an emergency rule to adjust if needed.

With the change to a bag limit coming, we should stay the course and keep the quota the same.

Committee Recommendation: FAC recommends maintaining the 2000 river otter quota using the 3-year average success rates to allocate permits equitably across zones, similar to last year.

River Otter Bag Limit in 2020 led by Shawn Rossler – The FAC should discuss the 2020 otter bag limit and whether or not trappers should select a specific zone or be able to trap statewide in this framework.

The license year starts in March and otter season goes through April, we meet in May. Meaning we would either be discussing otter bag limits 1.5 years ahead or retroactively add harvest authorizations to people's accounts after May and after licenses have been sold. Would require outreach to trappers so they know to look for more tags or harvest authorizations.

It makes the most sense to talk about the current year at this meeting. The trappers can be educated on the process.

The OAS would suggest we start with a bag limit of 2 river otters per trapper. We would also suggest that trappers declare a zone. We can maintain a quota of 2000 or another number just to give us the option to close the season if anything changes drastically.

Couldn't the otter tag be statewide, and the harvesters can just indicate where they trapped their otter?

About 21,000 licensed trappers in the state but roughly half are active.

Can just a zone be closed, or would it need to be statewide closure?

Have to check on whether we have the ability to close down an individual zone or if it would need to be statewide, Closure of just a zone may be confusing.

We need to keep in mind that going to a bag limit may capture more of what is being killed as we know not all of the incidentals are recorded. The recorded harvest may increase while the actual harvest may stay constant. We do not know what doesn't get reported.

We are getting close to giving out 2 tags anyway so maybe this isn't that much of a jump. Everyone who applies already gets 1 with nearly 2000 of them getting a second.

With the retained ability to close the season, GLIFWC reps are more comfortable with a bag limit of 2.

A statewide harvest authorization would be more convenient for customers than needing to declare a zone.

Why have zones if we don't use them? Is it because they may be different in the future? Or that there may be zone specific harvest caps?

We could have different bag limits in the different zones.

Closing the season down early could create blowback to go back to a tag system.

To provide flexibility we could bump up the quota by 10% - 25% since the reported harvest may increase and split it evenly among the zones.

Harvest was a bit higher in the south last season but there isn't much difference.

Committee Recommendation: FAC recommends a 2-otter bag limit in 2020 with a statewide tag. Zone of harvest will be tracked through registration.

Where does the number 2000 come from, is a cap needed? Would fur market be important to consider when setting bag limits?

We are not concerned at our harvest level now, if things change that could change as well. Could include some retro pelt price for otter or even beaver and discuss this when we talk about bag limits.

If approved, we will suggest a 2-otter bag limit with statewide harvest authorizations. We will retain a quota or a zone-specific harvest cap as a safeguard.

With the new system, the tribes don't like bag limits. For tribes this would work best as an unlimited season. We watch and see what happens. Tribal harvest has been low so not a worry now. A harvest cap could be used as a quota.

We are hopeful that a good percentage of incidental otter get counted in the legal harvest now that everyone that applies gets an otter tag. We took around 20,000 beaver last season according to our surveys and by APHIS numbers, every 20 beaver equals an otter. Should have 1000 otter caught while beaver trapping but many of those would be tagged and counted in the legal harvest column.

To be more upfront for the customers, could we set the bag limit like this 1.5 years ahead and set the quota for the current year.

Would prefer setting everything for the current year at this meeting.

Just makes it a bit more awkward for the customer but we can add harvest authorizations after this meeting if considering the most current data is of importance.

Bobcat – North Zone led by Nathan Roberts and Glen Stauffer – Bobcats have their own unique data challenges with 2 methods of take. Makes CPU effort tougher as the methods need to be treated separately. We have a population model in the north but not the south for bobcats. In the north we

collected information, adjusted management and then monitored the population. Everything seems to be running smoothly with the higher quotas the past couple years in the north. Now we have a southern bobcat study area. After 2 years of data collection we are seeing a high survivorship in the south similar to what we saw in the north prior to the quota increase a couple years ago.

Bobcat zones have stayed constant. This past year we saw a nearly equal sex ratio which is different than the male dominated harvest for the past several years. We had a total bobcat harvest of 581 in 2018 which is a modest increase from 555 in 2017. Hound hunting as a method decreased in harvest percentage while trapping increased which may explain the difference in sex ratio as hound hunters tend to select bigger animals which tend to be males. Success rates have been trending down. Harvest is skewed towards adults, but the percentage has been declining opposed to juveniles since 2010. With the selectivity, the age and sex ratios are less indicative of the total population than in other species with less selection. Most people indicate a stable to increasing bobcat population from our surveys. There has been a decline in the number of bobcats run per day over the past decade or so as reported by our hunters. The catch per unit has been decreasing.

If the hunting conditions are rough the hound hunters often eat their tags, they don't tend to switch up their methods to try to trap.

What percentage of bobcats hunted are taken without the use of dogs.

Most of them. Only 9 were taken in 2018 while calling which was the second most popular hunting method behind dogs.

Track counts have been discontinued as a reminder.

In the northern zone we have a population model. We jumped the quota substantially 2 years ago and wanted to keep that stable for a couple years to see what changes occur. We have seen success rates drop but survivorship estimates are still relatively high according to our collared animals. The OAS would suggest maintaining the same 550 quota and use the average 3 year success rates to allocate tags. That will make for a few more tags since success rates have fallen a bit. Success rates are calculated separately for each zone and season.

GLIFWC reps agree, lets continue on with this at this same rate. A 550 quota seems to be right in the stabilizing zone according to the model projections.

This past season over much of the state good tracking conditions were few and far between. This made for tough hound hunting conditions. The lack of deep snow may have had some benefit to trappers.

Committee Recommendation: Maintain the quota of 550 bobcats in the north, using the average success rates over the past 3 years to allocate permits.

Bobcats – South Zone led by Nathan Roberts – We don't have a population model in the south. We have been using incremental increases since the season began and watched for any signs that the population was decreasing. Now we have some collar data in the southwest part of the state. I think what we did in

the north worked and I would like to see that same approach in the south. The OAS suggests a significant increase in the southern bobcat quota to 500. Just as in the north, we will watch for any signs that this level of harvest is unsustainable. Bobcats are a generalist species and the southern part of the state is more productive than the north. You see the highest densities in the SE and southern Midwest. I would predict that bobcat densities would be higher in the south than the north eventually if they aren't already.

Bobcats seem to be increasing, I could be on board with the much higher quota to see what happens.

What data would we look at to see if there are any problems.

A change in CPU in trapping only, changes in age distribution and distribution of harvest from year to year would be what I would look for red flags. Hound hunting could confound the age structure so would probably be omitted. The trapping data should be more representative of the whole.

We can also look at our collared animal's survivorship for red flags.

Since 2014, when the south zone opened have we seen an impact to who applies for the north in the 1st time period?

Haven't looked at that specifically. I know wait times for the 2nd time period was mostly unchanged.

We have collared 33 animals in the south to date and will continue to put collars out down there. We will continue to present this data for the next couple years.

I don't hear anything in the SE about bobcats one way or the other. Few sightings but people might not be looking too.

Committee Recommendation: The FAC recommends an increase in the southern zone bobcat quota to 500, using the 3 year average to allocate tags.

What are the surrounding states doing?

Most of the surrounding states have more liberal take than we do but with fewer trappers and no or little hunting, especially with hounds.

We assume a high illegal take in our bobcat model so I think even with this increase we could still allow for population expansion.

People may have already applied for bobcat tags in the north but may want to switch zones with this increase. Can they?

They can change zones up until the August 1st drawing.

Why do you assume a 25% illegal take?

We just want to acknowledge that it happens but have no way to quantify it. 25% was an estimation. As our sample sizes get bigger on our collared cats we can adjust this if we feel comfortable with the data.

At this quota level we also need to think about sample sizes and what we need. We don't need to handle that many cat carcasses.

Hunting Fisher with Hounds Discussion led by Jim Hanson – We feel that this won't impact the trapping at all and opens opportunity to run fisher with hounds.

The WTA has not supported this in the past but in the spirit of cooperation I think we can gather support. We are hoping this gesture might prompt the bear hunters to support looking at the possibility of using foot-cables to trap bears.

The hound hunters have supported cables for other species.

The shooting aspect could lead to concerns for LE.

It is an opportunity to expand to other user groups, the first route might be to introduce this onto the spring hearings.

Back in the 90's the discussion was about fur value and how shooting them could devalue the pelt.

We also need to consider success rates and how if they increase, the tags available would be more limited.

The applicant pool might go up as well.

We couldn't really open this up to only hound hunting, it would need to include calling and other forms of hunting as well.

They come into bait piles regularly, people could just shoot them there too.

This should really go to the WCC to see what the state thinks about it.

Especially if we go away from in person registration, this could be tough to track.

In the WCC this could go to either the furbearer committee or the legislative. If legislative changes aren't needed it would go to the fur harvest committee.

Everyone's claiming that hound hunters won't take that many fisher and opportunities would be limited, is this even worth considering this if few people are going to try it?

Need to think about unrecovered losses too. Fisher can end up pretty high in the trees and might move more than bobcats, raccoons or bears.

Give it more thought I don't think it's right to drop this.

Committee Representation Discussion led by Shawn Rossler – We went from 2 northern reps down to one, what are the committees thoughts?

If we went back to 2 northern representatives, would it be a NE and a NW rep?

Not necessarily just 2 from the north. In a committee review the second was eliminated to be consistent with other committees.

Was that a holdover from when the north used to be 2 regions.

I think it has more to do with furbearer zones and how they match up with our districts. We do have 3 reps from the southern furbearer zone and now just 1 from our north furbearer zone.

This is unique where everything is split by north/south. The north region is a big region and I think that having 2 reps makes sense. I don't understand what it hurts to have 2?

To me it makes sense if the meeting is up here we should have people from up here at the meeting.

I agree, it's been valuable having 2 northern reps. Jenna also added a perspective that we don't always get from this group. Diversity is a good thing.

Does anyone feel that it would be unfair to have more reps from the north than other regions?

Not that its unfair but this could create more headaches for other committees who also lost members. I think the leadership team has been worried about workload and cutting some committee reps was a way to lesson that.

Committee Recommendation: The FAC recommends that the second northern district representative is reactivated.

Adamantly support this.

Spring Hearing Results led by Shawn Rossler – Allowing incidental raccoons to be kept passed, allowing trapping on beaver dams also passed. No surprises here.

There has been some confusion with the trapping on beaver dam issue, will this be cleared up?

The language was confusing on the questionnaire, but we can clean up the language to make it easier to understand. Originally, we were going to treat the north and south differently, but things changed in the rules committee to keep things simple it was made the same statewide. This caused some issues in the wording on the question but that won't carry over in the rule language.

On the congress side there were 5 advisory questions. Dispatching animals near the road with firearms – passed in all counties. Expansion of the fisher season into February – passed in 64 counties.

Liberalization of colony trap rules was three questions, 2 passed. Within 3 feet of culverts passed. Use of bait and or lure passed. The third was using fencing to force muskrats into the trap and this one failed

the total vote but passed barely in the county votes. Close to dead even. The congress is officially against this question.

If any of those are going to advance, they need to be discussed in this committee.

The questions that require legislative action we will hold off on discussing in this meeting. We can talk about the colony traps here.

I think people were confused about the wording on the colony trap and fencing question. People were thinking about fencing going all across the stream which people didn't like. I think a common definition on this would be better. Fencing with body grip traps is fine but illegal with colony traps. They should be treated the same.

We took the three colony trap questions to the executive council and they got hung up on the fencing part of it. They wanted to create a maximum on the fencing which would be confusing. At some point the DNR will put this on as a question, a proposed rule change and the language can be cleaned up at that time.

Is there anything outside of these three questions that we want to look at?

The committee approves supporting all three changes.

County Resolutions Discussion led by Ed Harvey – In Dane county and a couple others we saw resolutions aimed at stopping the competition hunts and will be dealt with by the fur harvest committee. There was a Dane county resolution establishing a coyote season, there were several about the opening time for muskrat season, trapping access on navigable waterways, banning killing furbearers with a catch pole, extended the late bobcat period into February, increasing the cable restraint season length – been talk on this for several years, changing the submersion set language so it's easier to interpret. The fur harvest committee will address all of these in September.

Potential 2021 Rule Proposals – Colony traps will be included in this most likely. The cable restraint season length would be another issue we may want to discuss. This would not require legislation, so we can make a recommendation on this. This was on the agenda last year.

Why was the cable-restraint season limited in the first place?

Being cautious and the bird dogs on the landscape.

Also, raccoons could have been an issue. Cables are not a good trap type for raccoons.

From our trap incident data, we haven't seen issues with dogs and cables. Our data shows cables to be very humane on domestic dogs.

Cables are one of the best success stories in trap advancement in my opinion. The trend is going the right way.

Committee support to lengthen the cable-restraint season.

I don't know if this would fly on public land.

I think pheasant hunters may not like it at first but cable-restraints have a much lower rate of injury than body-grippers which are perfectly legal.

We could put this on as an advisory question.

The congress will likely do this.

Updates on Current Housekeeping Rules led by Shawn Rossler – We are amending the definition of enclosed trigger traps to include push and pull triggers. A DIT has already allowed this but in code that wasn't the case. Just cleaning up the language.

A couple committee members mention how the pull only trap is more selective and is preferred.

Push/pull type enclosed trigger traps are not currently approved by the BMPs. We want to encourage people to use BMP traps.

We will need to watch for incidentals with this. The push type trap is less species specific. Some committee members are hesitant to move forward with push/pull enclosed trigger traps.

The last housekeeping rule was to clarify that landowners and agents can use bait and lure outside the harvest season.

Most people never knew about this anyway. Lots of people were breaking the law by using bait for nuisance animals. Makes sense to clean this up, no issues.

Is there any other topic that the committee would like to discuss before we adjourn?

Are there going to be beaver management meetings?

We will be holding meetings next year and pull the task force together in 2020.

Folks were not satisfied with the notification of the last round of meetings or their level of involvement. Biologists felt that they weren't as much a part of the process as they should have been. They would like more open discussion on where and how management occurs between wildlife and fisheries staff.

We can talk and try to rectify any concerns. Last time was the first go around and so we can certainly improve. We don't want anyone to feel left out.

To us we thought this would be an area type meeting discussing which streams would be managed and felt like these meetings were more region based. We were looking for a more intimate meeting with fisheries staff that we know.

What is the 50% rule on streams, how does that decision work? I don't think anyone has seen any changes on how streams are managed in the field. Not wanting to increase the frequency of the meetings but biologists would like to be more involved.

The people who were involved in the meetings were selected by wildlife and fisheries leadership.

We need to talk about badger. We should have a badger season. We have a recent study showing that the badger population is robust and could sustain a harvest. The surrounding states all have badger seasons.

We moved on this before, but it was tabled due to being too controversial. One of the things that came up is who is asking for it?

We have overwhelming support for a badger season within the WTA.

This committee supports a badger season.

Thanks to all committee members and guests for their participation.

FAC meeting adjourned at 2:21 PM